

April in the Highlands, 1977

By P. M. STIRLING*

After delaying our visit to Scotland due to the poor weather conditions at Easter, Mike Britton and I finally left the home counties at 9.30 on the evening of the 20th April and arrived at Struan, Perthshire, about 7.30 the following morning.

Intermittent rain on the motorways dampened our hopes a little and we found the posts at this well known locality quite wet. However, we did see a fresh male *Cleora cinctaria bowesi* Richardson and several specimens of *Trichopteryx carpinata* Bork. of both sexes. Females of *Agriopis marginaria* Fab. were also patronising these posts, although it appeared that *Nyssia lapponaria* Boisd. must have been over at this locality as we failed to see this species here throughout our stay. A single larva of *Diacrisia sannio* Linn. was found here on heather.

In the afternoon we moved on to Loch Rannoch and tried for the second successive year to locate *Conopia soliaformis* Bork., but the species eluded us again and all that we found was a vast quantity of holes caused by some other insect. Sweeping the heather in the Black Wood at Rannoch produced a number of larvae of *Xestia castanea* Esp., *Phragmatobia fuliginosa* Linn., *Lycophotia porphyrea* D. & S. and *Alcis repandata* Linn., but no *Dasychira fascelina* Linn. which we had found not uncommon here in 1976; we also found single specimens of *Ectropis bistortata* Goeze and *Archieapis parthenias* Linn. That evening the rain became rather heavy and our lights at Rannoch only attracted a few *Orthosia gothica* Linn., *O. stabilis* D. & S. and *O. crude* D. & S.

On the 22nd we left the Rannoch area and on the way to Aviemore stopped first near Tummel Bridge and were delighted to find four female *N. lapponaria* Boisd. on posts, together with *T. carpinata* Bork. and *E. bistortata* Goeze. At the last minute we again decided to stop at Struan and were surprised to find a number of fresh *C. cinctaria bowesi* Richardson on the posts of the deer fence. We had thought that the heavy rain and wind would have driven most insects to cover, but we were delighted to be proven wrong. Again *T. carpinata* Bork. and a single *Colostygia multistrigaria* Haw. were also present.

En route to Aviemore we stopped on some fairly high ground and were excited to find the first male *N. lapponaria* Boisd. of our stay. About twenty were located on posts along a stretch of about half a mile. However, only a couple of females were seen, indicating that the high elevation had retarded their emergence. We also found a single fresh *Achlya flavicornis* Linn., another species which appeared to be over in all other localities we tried on this visit.

That evening we pitched the tent in some woodland near Aviemore and with high hopes of exciting things to come set

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out the lights and commenced to work the sallows. Despite not having a sheet, which we later found buried in the car, we managed to dislodge some *finemothicina* forms of *O. gothica* Linn. and some attractive specimens of *O. incerta* Hufn., as well as several *Xylena vetusta* Hübn. from which we eventually obtained a number of ova. *Cerastis rubricosa* D. & S. in its silvery northern form appeared quite common also.

The next morning the traps held most of the previous evening's species, with the addition of several specimens of the large northern form of *Lycia hirtaria* Clerck. However, there were no *Brachioncha nubeculosa* Esp. for which we were undoubtedly too late.

Later in the morning after a brief snow shower we ventured out on to Granish Moor, although with the exception of a few *A. parthenias* Linn. we drew a blank at this locality, and in the afternoon returned to the woods of our previous night's activity. After scanning miles of posts our only reward in the way of lepidoptera was a single female *Lycia hirtaria* Clerck, although we were treated to some fine close sightings of a pair of buzzards at their nest and shortly after discovered that we had pitched our tent about ten feet below a pair of nesting long-tailed tits.

In the evening we laid out a fairly extensive sugar run on posts and birch trunks and hardly had we put the brushes away before one of these patches had attracted a fine *Xylena exsoleta* Linn., and a further specimen was on another patch much later in the evening. Another birch trunk yielded *Orthosia incerta* Hufn. *in cop.*, and we noted all the species from the previous evening again at sallow, with the addition of *O. populeti* Fab.

On the 24th we returned to Struan and en route revisited the *N. lapponaria* Boisd. colony where we found the species to be even more common and stretching further along the posts. A pair were noted *in cop.* and eventually we did find both sexes sitting on bog myrtle well away from any posts and seemingly just basking in the sun. We had the pleasant surprise at this locality of finding a number of *Macrothylacia rubi* Linn. larvae sunning themselves on the grass, although it required a great deal of walking as they were spaced very widely apart. Most had pupated within about forty-eight hours, and nearly all had emerged by the end of May. A cocoon was found on heather very reminiscent of the Ruby Tiger, but on 17th May it proved to be a fine female *Acronicta menyanthidis* Esp.

Arriving back at Struan we briefly scanned the posts and found several more *C. cinctaria bowesi* Richardson and a single female *A. marginaria* Fab. That evening the lights were placed in some unopened sallows and a sugar run was put out on alders by the river. Some fine sallows in blossom were duly shaken and produced specimens of *X. vetusta* Hübn., *O. stabilis* D. & S., *O. gothica* Linn., *O. incerta* Hufn. and *C. rubricosa* D. & S. However, apart from a single *cinctaria* the sugar proved a complete blank.

We inspected the trap the following morning but found nothing new, although several more large *L. hirtaria* Clerck were very welcome, and finally we again noted *cinctaria* sitting on the posts. Leaving Struan at 10.30, we were home for supper.

BEGINNER'S LUCK! *COSCINIA CRIBRARIA* L. SSP. *ARENARIA* LEMPKE (LEP.: ARCTIIDAE) IN KENT. — On the 6th July, 1977, I found in the Rothamsted light trap which I run in my garden a moth which I did not immediately recognise. This is not an unusual occurrence, as I have only extended my interests to moths in the last two years or so. However, after consulting South, I concluded that I had caught something pretty unusual. As far as I could judge, it was a fresh male *C. cribraria*, and since it was very lightly marked I concluded that it might be ssp. *arenaria* Lempke, which "has been taken occasionally at Dungeness, no doubt immigrants from the Belgian coast sand dunes" (South, 1961 edition).

At this point I went to work feeling very pleased with myself! My doubts that I had really got *C. cribraria* increased as the day wore on and by the time I got home again, I was sure I must be wrong. A second examination, however, confirmed my opinion. Then I consulted Mr. Chalmers-Hunt's *Butterflies and Moths of Kent*, Vol. II, and discovered that, far from occasionally being taken at Dungeness, only one had ever been taken there—on 21st July, 1934—and that only four altogether had ever been taken in Kent, the other three occurring at Sandwich, the latest in 1937. This renewed my doubts! I decided that it would be foolhardy to rush into print and I would wait for a second opinion. This I have now received and I am pleased to record that Mr. R. F. Bretherton confirmed that it is a male *Coscinia cribraria* L. ssp. *arenaria* Lempke. (Taken 5th July, 1977 at Minster, Sheppey.) In the hope of taking further specimens of the moth, I ran an m.v. lamp, in addition to the Rothamsted trap, over the following week or so, but without any success.

It would seem most likely that it was a migrant from the Belgian coast, as there are certainly no sand dunes in this area, although it would have received little or no wind assistance for its fairly long trip, as conditions had been calm for some days. Particularly surprising is the freshness of the specimen. There is little or no loss of scales. (Perhaps it came by ferry from Flushing to Sheerness!) The black markings on it are very scarce and it lacks completely the streaks which normally run the length of the fore-wings.

My thanks to Mr. R. F. Bretherton for confirming the identification. I hope to be able to report more specimens next year! — GEOFFREY N. BURTON, "Mar-y-Mar", Minster Drive, Minster-in-Sheppey, Kent, ME12 2NG.